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OUR COUNTRY¹

A land broad and fair and free, its shores washed by two mighty oceans; its giant mountains guarding priceless treasures; its trackless forests yielding the hoarded wealth of centuries; its mighty rivers bearing the fortunes of untold millions; its endless myriads of resources still but scarcely touched and beneath their surface boundless realms of prosperity and abundance; that is our country—that is what in our admiring love for it we, the children of this great nation, are wont with good reason to call God's own country, America. No empty rhetoric is this; not fancy but fact furnishes the reason of our enthusiasm for such a birthright as every citizen of America can call his very own.

Were this a gathering of financiers eager for still greater wealth, of merchant princes yearning for still bigger markets, of adventurers sighing for still richer fields, the story of this country's material resources, of mines still hidden, of rivers still wasted, of railroads still unplanned—in a word, the recounting of the money power of all these things still waiting to be energized, would be a theme to thrill such an audience eager to learn more and more of all of America's future and America's promise to those who can wrest her secrets from her and lead the way to her boundless treasure-house.

And yet, when all that fascinating story has been exhausted, the true core of the hold America has upon our faithful love still remains unrevealed. And so, to those who like you here present are dominated not by mere material aims and hopes and selfish purposes, but by nobler and higher impulses and instincts and ideals, the enumeration of the sources of wealth of our country, while interesting enough to hear, will still leave you not unim-

¹ The authentic text of the Address delivered before the Federation of Catholic Societies, at Madison Square Garden, New York City, August 20, 1916.

pressed but almost apathetic and cold. And the reason is not far to see.

For well you know that out of the teeming millions of our population few indeed will ever be asked to sit at the banker's desk, few, very few, will ever occupy a chair at the board meeting whose sole business is to count its wealth and make it grow to even larger proportions. By far the great bulk of the people in America, as elsewhere, will ever bear the burden of the day and the heat, and the unknown millions here as in every other land must daily bend to the weight of toil and labor—a toil and a labor which well we know grow at times into a burden almost intolerable. Surely, to these millions the story of the wealth and resources of America must have but a small fascination, since they know full well that they will never either see them or touch them or hold them. There is but one thing in all this world that for these millions of toilers can lighten their burden and lessen the weight of their labor. It is that sacred light shining through the gloom of the workman's life which converts his heavy burden into a joyous hope. It is that sacred spark of heavenly fire which, amid all the benumbing pettiness of a sordid life, gives him the courage and the spirit to lift his eyes to the level of every man, however far above him, with a sure sense of fundamental equality.

It is the knowledge that he is a man as any other man, whatever his station; that he is neither chattel, not thing, nor possession, but an individual, a person, free in body, in mind and heart; in a word, the one thing that constitutes his earthly happiness is his freedom. That is the wealth dear to the human heart beyond all the kingdoms of the world. And that, more than all else, infinitely more than all the treasures of this country, is the very heart and core of the love we all bear for America.

It is because America is the home of freemen and because over all alike waves her sacred banner of liberty, that we love her with a love next only to that we owe to the Kingdom of God. It is because every man living on her sacred soil can say those three little words, "I am free," whether he be rich or poor; that whatever his race or color or creed, he can tread the earth upright, and freely measure the power of his brain and the strength of his sinews with all the other millions of men about him; it is because he has a government which he helps to make and an

opportunity which he helps to create, that he is hemmed in by no legal disadvantages, that he is neither bondsman nor serf nor slave; it is because of this and this alone that every citizen of this land loves her with an undying love and strives for her stability and perpetuity.

Take away freedom from a nation and what is all the rest? The deep mines of gold and silver and copper, the endless wealth of industries, with the comforts and luxuries they purchase—what are all these without freedom? Nothing, nothing, less than nothing. It is as if you had blinded a man and then in mockery bade him gaze at the beauty of the heavens. Even in a gilded cage the prisoner beats upon the bars, tears them and rends them, or dies still crying the heart-rending cry of the human soul—liberty.

And what is liberty? Since it means so much to all human life that nothing can take its place or supplant it, it is well to study just what it is and what depends upon it. One thing we know is certain, that upon our answer hangs not only our own individual happiness, but the very existence of America itself. For if it is true that America has given us liberty, it is truer still that liberty alone can preserve America. This is no paradox, but the simplest truth. Let us see. If by liberty is meant that every American is a law unto himself, then let me say here, frankly and fearlessly, that neither America nor any other land ever had the right to grant such liberty. For America, good as she certainly is, never has intended to be so good as to destroy herself. And nothing is more certain than this, that any nation granting to each man the right to be a law unto himself—that moment signs her own death warrant.

There certainly can be no need to labor this argument. Is there any one in the whole land who does not see that under such terms of liberty there can be neither crime nor criminal, neither court nor prison, neither law nor law-giver, nor property, nor rights, nor state nor government. Such liberty of America would mean her suicide. That much must be clear to everyone. And since we see all about us courts and legislatures, the officers of government and the prisons for criminals, the clear interpretation must be that even American liberty means freedom with restraint, a freedom according to standards, fixed and settled by law. Indeed, liberty and law must always go hand in hand.

Now let me ask, since restraint must ever accompany true liberty, in what is a free man truly free? The only answer to that question is, he is free for good, not for evil. And here we are at once before another all-important question—what is good and what is evil? And since it is the purpose of civilized government to answer that question in every statute it frames, we pass immediately to the dilemma, between the horns of which every organized state must finally be driven, either the absolutism of tyranny formulating its own inflexible decrees of right or wrong, and maintaining itself by force alone, or the divine right of justice resting upon the eternal principles of God and inscribed upon the nation's statute books as the highest guide to all her citizens.

This means, if it means anything at all, that as there can be no liberty without law, there can be no law without God. And so every human being in search of liberty must inevitably accept one or another of these three things,—absolute anarchy, absolute state tyranny, or the law founded upon the eternal principles of divine justice; either the whim of a tyrant resting alone on force of arms, or sacred law founded upon the principles of religion, or no law at all. Let him seek and seek forever, but from this inexorable logic he can never hope to escape.

It follows very clearly from this that the state which throws off religion must by inevitable necessity accept either anarchy or tyranny, and both end in utter destruction. No one who knows anything at all of past history can help seeing that this is the positive teaching of facts. The whole story of Rome and Greece and Assyria and Egypt points clearly to this one only conclusion. Every single one of them was founded on a religious basis of law. And whatever of strength they gathered or gained they wrested from popular faith in those principles. As in time the falsity of their superstition became manifest, their false divinities were thrown to the winds. Yet, utterly false as they were, they lent some fundamental ideas of a spiritual responsibility to a power outside and above themselves.

So long as that idea of responsibility lasted it gave strength to authority and power to the nation. When the people discovered the folly of their own incredulity all authority went with it and anarchy was at the door. And soon luxury, effeminacy, avarice and the whole family of human vices weakened

every shadow or law, and the greatness and power of all these nations utterly disappeared. For a short while the tyranny of absolutism was substituted for the restraint in which even their superstitions served to hold them. But soon the tyrants met the usual fate of all tyrants, the door was suddenly wrenched open, the eternal enemy, the barbarian, stood in the threshold and a great empire had fallen.

It is a far cry from America to ancient Assyria and Egypt, and yet from out the graves of fallen empires the warning voice of history speaks even to this youngest of all the nations, our own America. But nearer, much nearer, comes many another warning. Not once, but a hundred times, have even the modern Christian nations learned the awful cost of that lack of eternal vigilance which alone can safeguard liberty. And even today, poor blood-drenched Europe, though she strive to hide even from her own eyes the true cause of this suicidal war, is at last thoroughly convinced that the Voltaires and the Vivianis, the Haeckels and the Nitzsches, the Tolstois and the Huxleys, the Kants and all the rest of that monstrous brood, who for now many years have poisoned the thought and embittered the heart of the student youth, are now reaping their terrible but abundant harvest.

The children before whose eyes the crucifix, the sign of renunciation and restraint, was torn from the wall of the school-room, and from whose little books the very name of God was blotted out in infamy, the generations trained in the selfish principle whose chief dogma was: "Let us live for today, for tomorrow we die," are dying by the millions. And unless an all-merciful God soon rescues Europe, only a small fragment will be left to tell the story, the bitter, heart-rending story of how much sorrow and suffering it takes to lead a nation out from the blindness of infidelity up again to its ancient vision of God, of the law of Christ, and of the happiness of a Christian state.

No, the lessons are not far to seek, but who, even now, takes the pains to read them? Even today when all Europe is expiating its crime against God and its desertion of His law, on every square of our great cities an apostle of open infidelity is shouting his gospel, his appeal to the millions. Freedom, freedom, is their cry and their shibboleth. Free thought, free life, free love—that is their Trinity and their whole gospel. We know there are

thousands—yes, hundreds of thousands—who are rushing to meet that cry, men who want neither law nor restraint nor government of any kind. Their conventicles are wide open; their existence is no secret.

But there are millions—yes, millions—and the number is growing yearly, who, though not openly joining their ranks, have accepted their principles. Any one who knows anything at all of this country must know that this is the actual condition of things; and, knowing that, can he for one moment doubt that this government and this nation are on trial for their very life in a thousand tribunals all over the land?

Do you think that people like these who have cast aside God and law are merely looking calmly on while a few, by fair means or foul, are gathering in such wealth as even emperors have never dreamed? And do you think that the child, whose only catechism teaches him that God is a myth, that property rights are legal robbery and that marital laws are sheer nonsense, is going to grow up tomorrow an inactive witness of the intolerable conditions all about him? Do you think that he is not waiting for the day when he will be big enough and strong enough to put into violent practice the solemn lessons so sedulously taught him? Why, the very streets of the whole nation are filled with the cries of every manner of doctrine against organized society and all that it stands for and everything upon which it rests. Here under our very eyes the axe is being laid to the root of the tree. We have only to look to realize that the very corner-stone of our government is menaced from a hundred different angles.

If ever America needed the whole-hearted love of her children, it is today. If ever she needed to prepare not merely to guard against attack from without, but more, a thousand times more, against dangers which threaten her very existence, it is today—dangers all the more insidious that they don the cap of freedom and clothe themselves in the garb of Guardians of Liberty. I know there are thousands—yes, millions—of our best citizens who see these dangers and are alert to their malicious and corrupting influences. But of all that vast array of those who love America, upon none may she so surely and reliably depend in every need and emergency as upon the eighteen millions of Catholics, who are proud to be at the same time subjects of the kingdom of God on earth and citizens of America. It is not we Catholics

but the leaders of all the non-Catholic bodies who openly declare that Protestantism has lost its hold upon the masses—that every year hundreds of their churches are closed and those still left open are half empty. It is not we but the Protestant leaders themselves who say that the descendants of those who a century ago had a living faith in God, in Christ, and in the tenets of their belief have in our own day drifted into open infidelity and scepticism which has eaten out the whole fabric of their faith. And if they who best know avow these things, then undoubtedly they must be true. And if this is true, then it means just one thing—that the moral fiber and the moral principles upon which alone this government depends for its strength are just by so much the weaker; and it is equally true that American liberty has just so many less to defend it and to safeguard it.

We are making no accusations here—we are merely repeating the very words of hundreds of those who are recognized as leaders and prophets among their own co-religionists. But side by side with these admissions is the other fact which we know and which they all know quite as well as we: one of the startling phenomena of the age is the tremendous growth of Catholicism in America—a growth so startling and so impressive and so urgent that each year it taxes to the utmost capacity the ever-increasing number and size of the churches and the tireless labor of bishops and priests whose care it is to minister to them. And it is well for the present and future of America that this is so, for here at least is a religious organization upon whose sterling and steadfast worth she can absolutely rely, as the very cornerstone of law and order, the prop and support of government, and a bulwark against the corrupting forces of anarchy and decay, of irreligion and infidelity. Look out over the whole field of the nation's activity and tell me what other organization in that whole field has her experience in dealing with the great masses of the people. What other organization has won as she has, and as she today right here in America possesses, the full confidence and loyalty and respect of the general population? Why are her churches forever overcrowded and her ministers forever overworked? Surely there must be an answer to this question.

Ask the ordinary man in the street and he will tell you—it is because no government owns her, but all government needs her.

It is because she will minister to the rich, but not one nor a thousand capitalists can purchase her or dominate her. It is because she holds the rich to a moral reckoning, and the richer and more powerful they are the less she flinches. It is because in a world which has gone mad for wealth she stands by the poor. It is because even from the poor she can still exact duty and virtue. It is because, though she loves all the outcasts and victims of the selfish world, she can unflinchingly make them throw down the arms of vengeance and take up the cross. It is because she loves even the blackest sinner and sends to his knees the false-hearted pharisee. It is because before her altar all men are equal, not in word but in very truth. It is because not one of the twenty millions who in America call her by the tender name of Mother but knows that though all the world forsake him, whether in shame or disgrace, in sorrow or in black despair, her arms are always open, through the whole day and through the darkest night, in love to his embrace, to strengthen him, to guide him, to comfort him. It is because of all the whole world he has found her alone always the same.

These and a hundred other motives, if you care to listen, the man in the street will give you as the reason for the Church's hold upon the people and the people's unwavering affection for the Church. And this wonderful and universal influence over the hearts of men is the reason why no one who has the welfare of the whole people at heart can afford to ignore her.

We are well aware of the suspicions with which she is regarded, the jealousy which her influence arouses. To the suspicious she answers: "Here are my principles, read them—they are no secret but the same for all alike." And to those jealous of her influence she replies: "Is thy eye evil because I am good?" Though her enemies and those who distrust her ask her brutally: "What do you want, and what are you after here?" she answers frankly, honestly and sincerely—"Nothing but liberty. We want only what is our right, the right of every legitimate organization in this whole country—no more, no less."

We are strengthening your hand as a nation by strengthening the moral fiber of the whole people. We teach them to love America even when often they can see small reason for unselfish affection. We teach them to obey your laws and respect your authorities; we care nothing for your mines, your wealth, or your

riches. We are neither a trust nor a syndicate who seek to control your franchises or exploit your resources. We inculcate truest patriotism founded upon divine law. We are here to help men to keep alive the light of their souls, the hope of heaven, the love of God. That and that alone is why we are working here. And for that we demand and insist upon our perfect liberty—a liberty which in the end brings far more help to you than you can summon from any other organization living under your flag.

We have not committed to this country the safeguarding of our lives, our fortunes, our property with any other understanding than that in return for our loyalty you guarantee us protection in what to us is the most essential of all human rights—religious liberty.

We ask no favor. Your protection of our liberty is no favor—it is a part of this dual contract between our country and ourselves. We pledge ourselves to keep our part—see to it that you keep yours as sacredly. We have a right, an unquestionable right, to legitimate representation in all the affairs of the country. If you discriminate against us, you are not keeping your contract; we are not getting true liberty.

If because a citizen is a Catholic, a thousand plausible pretexts are set out to discard him and discredit him in your cabinets and your courts, you are not keeping your contract: this is not liberty. If you stand by inactive, while under your very eyes, yes, through your very mails, which we pay for, we are insulted, scurrilously maligned and openly vilified in filthy journals and nasty, indecent literature, unfit to be printed or read, spread broadcast that dupes and bigots may be poisoned against us, so that we may be robbed even of our public rights—then you are not keeping your contract—this is not liberty. You are only wounding the hand, the strongest hand held out to help you; you are spurning the aid of those who again and again you have found in your hour of direst need the most willing to die for you. O yes, we know very well the whole litany of accusations against us. We give only a divided allegiance. We are scheming for government. These are all lies so patent that they need no answer. Indeed, those who fling them out will never listen to my answer. But I am going to answer them once and forever here tonight.

As a Cardinal I may be supposed to know what I am saying

on this subject. And on my word as a gentleman of honor I am speaking the simple, absolute truth. I have known intimately, personally and officially three Sovereign Pontiffs—three Popes of the Catholic Church. I am a priest now thirty-two years; I am a bishop fifteen years and a Cardinal five years. I have had the closest relations with not only the Pope, but the whole Roman curia. I know well every priest in my diocese, and every bishop in this country. Yet never, never in all that experience have I ever heard spoken, lisped or whispered, or even hinted by any or all of these, anything concerning America and American institutions but words of affection, of tender and kindest solicitude for her welfare; never a syllable that could not be printed in the boldest type and distributed throughout the land; neither plot nor scheme nor plan—but only sentiments of admiration and love. If there is plotting I ought to know it. Yet absolutely and honestly of such things I have never heard even a whisper. This is my answer to all these insinuations. That I know the truth I think no one will deny; that after such a pledge I am still concealing the truth, that I must leave to those who, I repeat, will never listen to my answer.

The Catholic civil allegiance divided? Why, look across the sea, to where all Europe is in arms. Every Catholic is fighting loyally, giving his very life for his own country. And though some of these countries have merited little gratitude from any Catholic, still the very priests are in the trenches, each a defender of his native land. Where, I ask of any honest witness of these facts under his very eyes, where is this divided civil allegiance? And the Pope—is there one in this country who after this war will ever dare to accuse the Pope of interference in civil affairs or of weakening the loyalty of citizens? Behold him the universal Father of the faithful, looking out over all the world, and weeping and praying for the peace of all the nations, offering solace and counsel to all alike—a lonely, pathetic figure like Christ—begging the world to listen that he may heal all and help all. The world knows the truth today of the position of the Pope in relation to all the nations. Not another word is needed.

Our country—the land which above all others we love most—God keep you free from such enemies, the worst of all that confronts you, whose hate would rob your most faithful sons of that for which they love you—liberty, true liberty, blessed holy

liberty—the freedom to worship God. Beyond our lives we love our Faith, and with these same lives we stand ready to defend the land which gives us liberty. These are the sentiments of every Catholic throughout the land; these the sentiments of every member of the Catholic Federation of America. It is that these sentiments may be better understood and more widely known that Federation exists and works and strives.

This great metropolis may well be proud of this gathering here tonight; yes, and America may well thank God that the Catholic Church, heeding neither malice nor slander, goes peacefully along her glorious way, fortifying the souls of men with the hope of a blessed immortality and building up the strength of the nations as she passes. For they who adore the King of Kings and recognize His dominion over all the world are always they who also learn to bow reverently to the just mandates of earthly authority. Such, America, is your good fortune—that while from a thousand sides your very existence is threatened by false and pernicious principles, the Catholic Church and this Catholic Federation stand ever ready in your defense by safeguarding the sanctity of law and the sacred principles of government. The Catholic Church and all her children abiding here love America with a sacred and undying love for the liberty she has promised to secure for her. Let America also learn to love the Catholic Church and Catholic Federation as the staunchest safeguard of American liberty.

WILLIAM CARDINAL O'CONNELL,
Archbishop of Boston.